

# RELIGION AND GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY: INHERENT INCOMPATIBILITY OR SYNERGY AND INTERDEPENDENCE?

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Given the importance of religion for the vast majority of humankind, it is critical that conceptualisations of global civil society facilitate a positive engagement of religious perspectives. However, some understandings of religion are simply incompatible with the underlying rationale and purpose of global civil society. This chapter explores ways of promoting possibilities of consistency between the two. As I see it, this outcome depends on how each side of this relationship is understood and practised in each context rather than on any preconceived notion of what these ideas mean. I therefore propose a synergistic and interdependent model of the relationship between religion and global civil society whereby each is understood in a way that supports the other. The policy question for governmental and non-governmental actors on both sides of the issue is how to promote those mutually supportive understandings of religion and conceptualisations of civil society.

I discuss this thesis and explore its policy implications in three sections. First, I attempt to clarify some contrasting views on civil society in general with a view to relating these to a more inclusive range of definitions of global civil society. I also examine some of the difficulties of the process of such broader conceptualisations of global civil society. The second section analyses Gandhian and fundamentalist perspectives in order to highlight possibilities and challenges of the proposed approach. In the third section I discuss 'liberal Islam' and 'liberation theology' for a better understanding of the contextual dynamics of local and global civil society highlighted in the first two sections. In conclusion, I attempt to bring all the sections together and draw some policy implications.

## A More Inclusive and Dynamic Understanding of Civil Society

I take as my point of departure the three propositions offered by Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, and Mary Kaldor in *Global Civil Society 2001*. First, 'the spread of the term "global civil society" reflects an underlying social reality', an entity of transnational, national and local non-governmental actors who are engaged in negotiations and discussion about civil matters with governmental, intergovernmental, and other transnational actors at various levels and the business sphere. This network has become 'thicker', stronger, more durable, and more effective over the past decade (Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor 2001: 4).

Second, global civil society 'both feeds on and reacts to globalisation', wherein the term 'globalisation' is used in three senses, namely, 'the spread of global capitalism', 'growing interconnectedness in political, social, and cultural spheres as well as the economy', and 'a growing global consciousness'. The impact of globalisation on global civil society can be measured according to various objective indices, such as the presence of transnational corporations, Internet usage, and action to promote respect for international human rights. The authors also assert, 'global civil society is best categorised not in terms of types of actors but in terms of positions in relation to globalisation' (Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor 2001: 7).

The third proposition is that 'global civil society is both a fuzzy and a contested concept', which the authors attribute to its 'newness'. The other factor contributing to the fuzziness of the concept is that different groups within global civil society have different stakes in defining global civil society. For

example, from an activist perspective civil society is more a matter of 'increasing the responsiveness of political institutions' than of 'minimising the role of the state' (Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor 2001: 11).

I do not disagree with these reflections as such, but feel that they do not take us far in conceptualising global civil society. I also find it useful to take these remarks as my point of departure because they highlight some of the tensions I will be discussing in this chapter. My analysis of the relationship between religion and global civil society is premised on clarification of three relationships, namely, that between the *composition* and *function* of global civil society, between *space* and *place*, and between its *nature* and *operation*. Clarification of the relationship between the composition and the function of global civil society, what it is composed of and what it is supposed to do, should in turn lead to asking whether the present composition of global civil society is conducive to realising its objectives. Moreover, one should also take into account the relationship between space and place in order to appreciate how global civil society may operate in pursuit of its objectives.

Global civil society is supposed to be the space where people and transnational entities debate and negotiate the rules of their relationships, and pursue accountability for those rules, in furtherance of their respective concerns. But the physical location of actors conditions their perceptions of, and participation in, that process. That is what I mean by the relationship between space and place. Since people do not interact with transnational entities on an abstract conceptual plane, the question is where and how they actually participate in global civil society activities in the physical world. The nature and dynamics of these two relationships, in turn, affect the way global civil society operates in practice at any moment.

Understanding the nature and dynamics of these three relationships can be helpful in distinguishing between essential features of global civil society and some of its activities or manifestations. For example, the fact that some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are now engaged in the provision of services that were traditionally supposed to be provided by the

state is a particular outcome of that process in specific place(s) rather than an essential feature of global civil society itself everywhere. To attribute this phenomenon to global civil society reflects a certain understanding of its composition and function

as well as being an example of how global civil society operates in practice. But the need for the provision of medical and educational services and development assistance by local and international NGOs reflects a change in the role of the state under currently dominant free-marked ideology and economic power relations. Approaching issues from another standpoint, other actors will have a different understanding of the nature, role, and operation of global civil society. Conceptualisations of global civil

society should therefore account for the impact of the physical location of its various constituencies on their respective objectives and possibilities of participation in the space it provides for collective action.

For global civil society to perform its role in this equation, it has to have a minimum normative content beyond its description as simply the non-governmental, non-profit 'third sector'. Otherwise, how would it set its own agenda and negotiating position in relation to other transnational entities? Since every analysis of global civil society must necessarily emanate from some implicit or presumed normative content, it is better to state that openly for debate instead of leaving it to the ideological or cultural bias of the analysis or actor. From my perspective, the critical question here is: by whom and how is that normative content to be determined? The true 'globalness' of global civil society requires a more inclusive sense of participants and process for this purpose. As I have argued in relation to the universality of human rights (An-Na'im 1992), one can of course begin with some *hypothesis* about the normative content of global civil society, but genuine universality has to evolve on the ground rather than being assumed or proclaimed on an abstract conceptual plane. The methodology I proposed for *constructing* the universality of human rights through an overlapping consensus among different constituencies about the normative content of global civil society, is to engage in an internal discourse

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within each of the constituencies and in a dialogue between them about elements of that content. The term 'overlapping' here indicates that consensus does not initially cover the whole field, but can grow to cover more common ground as participants engage in the process over time.

Accordingly, I suggest that global civil society can be seen as consisting of various actors with different objectives negotiating to broaden and deepen their overlapping consensus about the normative framework of their global association. This idea of overlapping consensus presupposes ideological and other differences, but also requires agreement on a core set of values for the negotiation process to achieve meaningful results. On the one hand, if there is no difference among

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various constituencies, there would be no need for an overlapping consensus. But that process is unworkable without agreement at least on the conditions necessary for the process of negotiation to continue, which include mutual respect and appreciation of cultural and contextual difference and the possibility of peaceful coexistence. Most importantly, all constituencies of global civil society must appreciate the need to construct an overlapping consensus over the normative content of their solidarity and cooperation rather than seeking to impose their own view of it on others. The considerations set out below appear to be relevant to this dynamic view of the process.

First, any definition needs to account for those aspects of civil life which are integral to the self-understanding and identity of members of a society. Hence, such a definition should provide for a space for such aspects of civil life that may not necessarily translate into objective indices that measure kinds of *linear* 'progress' that is suggested by the above-cited remarks of Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor (2001). In relation to the subject of this chapter, for millions of people around the world social, political, and cultural issues are inextricably tied to perceptions of religious identity in local context as well as to a religious rationale of social institutions and behaviour.

Second, close attention needs to be paid to the contextual dynamics of the formation of networks and alliances, to the process of formation of the

entities that are taken as representative of global civil society. Any definition of global civil society needs to engage with questions of the politics of solidarity and alliance-formation, and needs to include the space for that engagement in contributing to conceptions of global civil society. Relevant issues include an appreciation of the role of religion in motivating people to forge alliances as well as their choice of allies and objectives. The purpose of such appreciation is to facilitate cooperation across religious and ideological divides around issues of shared concern rather than to simply acknowledge the difficulty of doing so on the basis of a presumed 'non-negotiability' of religion. The underlying concern should be about empowering believers to claim global civil society as their own

medium of struggle for justice and human dignity.

Third, according to Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor (2001: 7), 'global civil society is heavily concentrated in north-western Europe'. It is in this region of the world that the largest number of parallel summits has been held and a majority of international NGOs secretariats are located. Whatever may be the reasons for this, an exclusive focus on *certain types of facts*, whether economic indices, literacy, or Internet access, as representative of global civil society would inevitably suggest that global civil society is more 'evolved' in one part of the world than another. This may obscure a crucial dimension of the process of transnational alliance formation that directly bears upon any conception of global civil society, namely, how *differentials in power relations* between various actors in global civil society affect the agenda, strategies, and outcomes of their solidarity. I am therefore calling for an understanding of global civil society in which the struggle to define the term itself reflects the struggles to achieve a global civil society.

Fourth, this unbridgeable differential in power relations between developed and developing countries is manifested in a variety of ways that inhibit sustainable consensus building around issues of religion and global civil society. For example, severe resource limitations inhibit the ability of research institutions in Third World countries to fund studies of their own local and national civil society, let alone global civil society, or to support the participation of

their local researchers in large-scale projects and international conferences. Whatever funding they are able to secure from foreign, 'donor' agencies and foundations has to be limited to the priorities of those sources. Western funding sources thus strongly influence decisions about what research issues of local significance are brought into the ambit of the international research community.

Moreover, research initiatives at the local level cannot be brought to the international academic and policy communities until they are *translated* into the terms of the dominant discourse of that framework. When such research requires understanding local forms of knowledge according to their own epistemologies, the translation process risks the loss of precisely that which makes a form of understanding contextually distinct. There is also always the risk that the international communities receiving this knowledge may find it difficult to understand what is being translated. Even when such knowledge reaches international academic

and policy communities, and is enriched by reflections and discussions there, that interactive 'final product' is likely to be translated *back* into its communities of origin and their local epistemologies. Issues of religion and religious identity are of course examined in relevant international scholarship, but the question is whether they are taken seriously in all their complexity in conceptualisations of global civil society.

Thus, conceptualisations of global civil society must take into account all aspects of civil life for different societies and communities around the world and with due regard to the impact of contextual and power-relations factors on the formation and dynamics of networks and alliances. It is from this perspective that I address the critical question for our purposes here, namely, how to mediate the tension between the presumed exclusivity of religious communities and their tendency to strictly enforce narrowly defined moral codes, on the one hand, and the requirements

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Above Friday dawn prayers, Gaza. © Chris Tordai/Panos Pictures.

of inclusion, civility, and freedom of choice of civil society, on the other hand. According to the proposed model for constructing an overlapping consensus over the normative content of global civil society, the mediation of this tension can happen through an internal discourse within religious communities and simultaneous dialogue with other constituencies. The challenge for those who engage in internal discourse within their own religious communities is how to promote understandings and practice of their religion that are more inclusive, civil, and voluntary, to enhance conformity with the essential qualities of global civil society. The corresponding challenge facing other constituencies of global civil society is how to cooperate with religious communities on that joint venture with due regard to the legitimate concerns of those communities.

The question whether some concerns are legitimate or not should itself be the subject of internal dialogue within religious communities and of dialogue with other constituencies. A practical guide for addressing this question is that the concerns of religious communities should be conceived in terms that are consistent with prerequisite conditions for the process of negotiation to continue, as noted earlier. Accordingly, for example, the political, economic, or security concerns of religious communities should be pursued through peaceful means rather than terrorist attacks and intimidation. Conversely, other constituencies must take the concerns of religious constituencies seriously and strive to address them. This is one the basic points I am trying to make regarding the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on the United States in my discussion of Islamic fundamentalism in the next section. But the main conclusion of this first section is that the contingent possibilities of reconciliation between religious and other constituencies of global civil society must be actively sought by all sides, instead of passively waiting for religious persons and communities to succeed or fail the test of inclusion. In my view, this outcome is critical to the success of the global civil society project, whether seen as a matter of tactical cooperation or of reluctant partnership.

## Global Civil Society and Religion: Possibilities and Challenges

I believe that religion and religious identity can be included in conceptualisations of global civil society precisely because current conditions of

globalisation clearly show that religion everywhere is *socially constructed*, dynamic, and implicated in socio-economic and political power relations to varying degrees in different contexts. However, I also believe that a sharp dichotomy between the religious and the secular is not necessarily the best way of conceptualising the relationship between religion and the state or politics. I will first illustrate these remarks with a review of Gandhi's views on religion that promise a positive relationship with global civil society. In the second part of this section I will consider the challenge of fundamentalism to both the normative and the process aspects of the relationship between religion and global civil society.

### Gandhi and civil society

Gandhi's views can provide a resource for more inclusive politics and a strong response to negative aspects of globalisation. The questions he struggled with included the notions of Indian identity that ought to be reflected in the Indian state in the context of competing conceptions of religious identity and spirituality. He also seriously considered issues of modernisation in relation to development and social justice. While Gandhi's ideas, and the movement that embodied them, preceded the current intensification of globalisation, they are relevant because similar questions clearly continue to be debated in different contexts, such as issues of the self-definition of peoples in post-colonial societies as well as matters concerning modernisation and development.

The significance of Gandhi's ideas for our purposes here can be highlighted through a discussion of two interrelated aspects of his assessment of civil society: first, his call for the secularisation of religion as a basis for civil society; and second, his view of civil society as a framework for mediating modernisation, where notions such as 'autonomy' and 'progress' are open to critique and examination. In exploring these aspects of Gandhi's thought, one can see that he sought to radically reframe three sets of relations that are central to the

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discourse of civil society, namely, those between the religious and the secular, between the individual and the social, and between the private and the public spheres.

### The secularisation of religion

For Gandhi, religious and secular conceptions of self and society did not have to be defined in opposition to one another. As he understood it, religion was *secularisable* through a perception of religion as *spirituality*. Gandhi's notion of the 'spiritualization of politics' was based on 'the idea that the spiritual diffuses all aspects of everyday life, including the political, and should form the basis of the way humans live' (Young 2001: 337). He viewed the spiritual as the substratum that oriented *all* aspects of an individual's life, and insisted that religious expression was inseparable from the expression of cultural, political, and social values. Gandhi viewed religion and religious identity as neither the sole province of the individual nor *merely* as a basis for political or social action. He emphasised that religion offered the individual an ethic to live by and that religion could *itself* be the mode and medium of political action and expression.

Gandhi's reading of religion was thus not restricted to a set of either practices or personal beliefs or ultimately delimited by scripture. Indeed, for Gandhi, religion was a source of multiple possibilities, both the form and the content for social, political, and cultural identity and expression. 'His approach to religion was therefore profoundly ahistorical, uninhibited, and anti-traditionalist, and liberal and he made no attempt to read the scriptures and understand the religious traditions in their own terms' (Parekh 1997: 37). This flexible and unsystematic framework allowed Gandhi to incorporate insights from diverse religious, cultural, and philosophical traditions and to define religion as an expression of social, cultural, and political values (Young 2001: 346).

One can appreciate Gandhi's belief in the possibilities religion accords for both civil *action* and civil *existence* in a manner that is fully consistent with conceptualising civil society as the condition for possible political independence and autonomy. For

the vast majority of humankind, to whom religion is an important dimension of their world view and source of normative guidance, the Gandhian notion of religion offers the possibility of full membership in, and engagement with, civil society, local, national, and global.

### Gandhi's critique of modernisation

The articulation of civil society in Gandhi's thought can be seen as part of a discourse about the form of 'development' a society may take. 'In his ideal society, tradition, politics, economics, social relations, and autonomy are tightly linked, but with modernization [as he saw it in relation to the India of his time], he believes that any possible harmony is elusive' (Terchek 1998: 119). By emphasising duties over rights, he sought to transform relations between the individual and the social (Young 2001: 338). He criticised modernisation for diminishing 'the sense of duties individuals once carried for one another' and he sought 'a society of mutuality among people who know and care about each other and *who recognize the many debts they owe one another*' (Terchek 1998: 110; emphasis added).

Gandhi also questioned the distinction between the public and the private spheres whereby morality is traditionally conceived as belonging in the private sphere, and economic choice and political freedom in the public sphere. For him, 'the irony of the new freedom from traditional practices promised by modernity is that people now rely on unseen and unknown actors in more and more ways' (Terchek 1998: 109). He questioned whether the notion of autonomy associated with modernisation was genuine and whether it constricted and diminished the lives of any segment of the population. The moral costs of modernisation *had to be part of the calculation* about any supposed increase in autonomy that modernisation could deliver. 'Gandhi also reminds us that people have multiple needs that are affected by the economy, not just economic ones' (Terchek 1998: 109). Developments in the public sphere, such as those pertaining to economics and technology, have a strong impact on the private lives of the members of a society.

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In my view, these are the sorts of insights about religion that can enhance the normative underpinnings of global civil society. But such synergy between the two cannot be realised without an effective and sustainable response to the challenge of fundamentalism, as illustrated by the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Gandhi's own India four decades after his assassination by a Hindu nationalist.

Gandhi's concerns about modernisation (read globalisation) and traditional understandings of religion appear to be fully justified in the light of the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India since the early 1990s. The link between fundamentalism and globalisation was one factor in the rise of the Hindu nationalist BJP to national power, as suggested by studies of the factors that led to the demolition of the Babri mosque at Ayodhya (Shah 1991; Freitag 1996). Claiming that this mosque had been built on the site of the destroyed Ram temple (the birthplace of God Ram), Hindu nationalists had launched a political protest movement that culminated in the destruction of the Babri mosque on 6 December 1992 (Zaman 1999: n. 7). That event continues to fuel cycles of widespread communal tension and Hindu-Muslim riots up to the time of writing (March 2002). The destruction of the mosque was supported by a distinct subset of the Indian population who identified themselves as 'Hindu'. They included 'traders, small business people, and white collar workers, and those who formed part of the age cohort whose formative years occurred in the partition era'. These were the same groups that had 'been most threatened by the new economic liberalization initiatives aimed at greater privatization and increased global competitiveness' (Freitag 1996: 226–7).

As also emphasised in relation to Islam below, religious fundamentalism is the product of particular circumstances and not inherent to religion as such. Under such conditions, whether in India, Iran, or elsewhere, religious symbols and discourse are used by disadvantaged groups to mobilise politically against perceived internal or external threats to their identity. While such apprehensions should be appreciated, the question is whether fundamentalist understandings of religion can provide an appropriate

response to such threats. For our purposes here, I believe the ideology of fundamentalism is inconsistent with an inclusive and civil global civil society, but that does not mean that the underlying concerns

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of fundamentalist movements should not be taken seriously. This view assumes that global civil society is the medium for generating and implementing effective and sustainable responses to national and global problems. But global civil society would of course do that in ways that safeguard its own essential nature as both 'global' and 'civil'. In my view, *all* four responses by global civil society to 11 September 2001, discussed in Chapter 1 in this volume, (peace, economic, spiritual, and legal) are interdependent, each needing the other three for its own success. For my purposes here, neither will

any of the other three work without the spiritual/religious, nor will the latter work without the former.

### The challenge of religious fundamentalism

The problem with religious fundamentalist movements is their tendency to be totalitarian in seeking to mobilise all the resources of a society for the realisation of their own specific vision of the public good. Each form of fundamentalism possesses its own characteristic features and particular forms of discourse in relation to its own frame of reference. But the common problematic feature they all share is their negation of people's ability to make their own moral and political choices and to live accordingly. Thus, the main problem with any form of fundamentalism is that it repudiates a people's right to self-determination at a personal or collective, social, political, and/or economic level. It is from this perspective that I see all forms of fundamentalism as constituting a challenge to civil society, local, national, and global.

While focusing here on religious fundamentalism, I should emphasise that similar difficulties for civil society at the global and national level also arise from chauvinistic secular or nationalist ideologies. Another caveat is that I discuss the challenge of fundamentalist Islam because its supranational appeal and aspirations are particularly relevant to those of global civil society, without implying that funda-

mentalism is peculiar to Islam (Juergensmeyer 2000). I should also note here that the following critique applies to the failure of religious fundamentalists to adhere to the normative and process requirements of global civil society, without dismissing their underlying concerns as necessarily misconceived or exaggerated. Indeed, I strongly believe that taking those concerns seriously is essential for an effective response to the challenge of fundamentalism, as a matter of principle as well as for tactical reasons. It is necessary for civil society to address such concerns not only to deny fundamentalists the use of such grievances in mobilising political support for their own political ends but also because such issues are integral to what civil society is supposed to rectify in any case.

Islamic fundamentalism can be found in different stages of Islamic history, but always as an exceptional response to a sense of severe crisis, and never as the normal state of affairs (Al-Azm 1993–1994). As such, Islamic fundamentalists are both the product and the agents of social change, who seek to influence events at home and abroad in favour of their own vision of the public good. In relation to civil society concerns, these movements are problematic on two counts: the demand to implement *Shari'a* (traditional formulations of the normative system of Islam) at home, and an understanding of *jihad* as aggressive war that is inconsistent with peaceful international relations. While the first problem apparently relates to national civil society, it is conceptually and politically connected to the second problem that is more directly relevant to global civil society. Both aspects are equally relevant here because global civil society must be concerned with issues facing local or national civil society, albeit at a global plane of conceptualisation and action.

Since Islamic fundamentalists seek to justify their claims as the legitimate exercise of the right of Muslim peoples to self-determination, their ideology should be judged by the validity of that claim. There are two aspects to this process, namely, the possibility of the verification of the claim of legitimate representation of the totality of national populations at home, and clear understanding of the realities of

global relations under which the right to self-determination can be realised. On the first count, Islamic fundamentalists must maintain a credible commitment to democracy at home so that Muslims can continue to express their support or opposition freely and without fear of violent retaliation. These movements must also respect the equal citizenship of non-Muslim nationals of the state because that is the only possible basis of peace, political stability, and economic development at home, and of acceptance in the international community abroad. In their relations with other countries, moreover, fundamentalists must accept the principles of the rule of law in international relations because that is also essential for peace, political stability, and economic development of their own country.

In my view, Islamic fundamentalism is unacceptable as a legitimate exercise of the collective right of Muslims to self-determination because of the inherent inconsistency of its essential precepts with the conditions under which this right can be realised in the modern context. It is clear that the internal and external context of claims of Islamic self-determination today is radically different from what it used to be in the pre-colonial era because all Islamic societies are now constituted into nation states which belong to global political and economic systems. They are all members of the United Nations and subject to international law, including universal human rights standards. None of these states is religiously homogeneous, politically insulated, or economically independent from the non-Muslim world. This drastic transformation of the internal and external context of self-determination is true everywhere in the Muslim world today.

It is neither legally permissible nor practically viable for fundamentalists to force other citizens of the state to accept and implement their view of *Shari'a* as a matter of state policy. At present, the vast majority of Muslims find it difficult to openly oppose its application, especially in view of their colonial history and current siege mentality. Nevertheless, I suggest, the idea of an Islamic state to enforce *Shari'a* is conceptually untenable, has no precedent in Islamic history, and is not practically viable in the modern context. The extreme diversity of views among schools

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of Islamic jurisprudence means that whatever view is enforced by the state will violate the religious freedom of other Muslims, as well as the human rights of women and non-Muslims. This idea was never realised in over fifteen centuries of Islamic history, and cannot operate in the economic and political conditions of the world today (An-Na'im 1999).

In relation to global civil society in particular, Islamic fundamentalism poses a serious challenge to peaceful international relations because of its ideological commitment to an expansive view of *jihad*. The commonly accepted view among the majority of Muslims is that *Shari'a* both restricted the legitimate causes of the use of aggressive force in *jihad*, and strictly regulated the conduct of hostilities. But there are also strong differences of opinion as to the precise scope of those restrictions when judged by the realities of international relations today (An-Na'im 1988). To exploit this ambiguity, Islamic fundamentalists tend to take a more expansive view of legitimate *jihad* than the vast majority of Muslims.

It is possible to make a strong Islamic theological/legal argument, I believe, against aggressive *jihad* in the modern context (An-Na'im 1990: 141–60). However, while some Islamic countries are better than others in securing the necessary domestic conditions, it is clear that the 'space' allowed for free debate and dissent is not sufficient. Moreover, and without being apologetic for some of the most oppressive regimes that rule over Islamic societies today, I urge that one should also appreciate the significant impact of external factors on those domestic conditions. As is true of other parts of the world, an Islamic society tends to become defensive and conservative when it perceives itself to be under attack, especially when that perception also undermines belief in the rule of international law.

In particular, the manner and scale of the military retaliation by the United States against the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and the failure of the

international community to check that unilateral use of force, constitute a fundamental challenge to the rule of law in international relations. Moreover, the United States continues (at the time of writing) to violate the most basic requirements of international humanitarian law for so-called Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters it captured in Afghanistan, and even minimum protections of due process of law for those suspects within its own domestic jurisdiction (Neier 2002). Whether there is no international legality at all, or it is too weak to cope with the realities of global power relations, this situation encourages Islamic fundamentalist perceptions of *jihad* as the aggressive and unilateral use of violence for political ends (An-Na'im 2002). Unless this regressive situation is redressed effectively, the idea of a global civil society is untenable, at least from the perspective of Islamic communities throughout the world. Moreover, this state of affairs will hinder the realisation of the objectives of global civil society for other constituencies. As Marlies Glasius and Mary Kaldor report in Chapter 1 of this book, global civil society has been losing ground over human rights since 11 September.

The preceding discussion of Islamic fundamentalism, as an illustration of similar religious fundamentalism as well as chauvinistic secular or nationalist ideologies, is intended to emphasise the need for an effective response if the idea of global civil society is to be a viable and coherent concept for all those who take religion seriously. An effective response to the challenge of fundamentalism is one way of mediating tensions between religion and global civil society. Another approach to the same end is to promote and support understandings of religion that are more conducive to a positive relationship with global civil society. It is in this light that I now turn to a discussion of liberal Islam and liberation theology as understandings of religion that are more likely to be consistent with global civil society. However, I wish to emphasise again that the outcomes of such initiatives are always contingent on a variety of internal and external factors and processes, and should never be taken for granted.

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## Liberal Islam and Liberation Theology: Dialectics of the Local, Regional, and Global

As explained earlier, by questioning modernisation and subjecting it to examination and critique from his own Indian perspective, Gandhi made this notion relative to, and located within, a specific context. He reserved the right of his society to understand and adopt modernisation *on its own terms*. The same perspective can be applied to conceptualisations of global civil society.

I will now explore this issue through the experiences of two regional civil society movements that take religion seriously: liberal Islam in the Muslim world and liberation theology in Latin America. The first is about the possibility of responding to the challenge of fundamentalist Islam from an Islamic perspective; the second is a religious response to issues of economic justice and globalisation. These two thematic studies are related in that, while liberal Islam is a direct response to a particular form of fundamentalism, liberation theology is a response to the circumstances of injustice and disempowerment that can fuel fundamentalism.

### Liberal Islam

The following discussion of liberal Islam/Islamic liberalism in relation to the triple problematic relationship of Islam, civil society, and global civil society will address the following questions in an integrated manner: Can there be a liberal Islam that does not conform to a particular Western understanding of liberalism and secularism? What is the contemporary context within which liberal Islam exists or can be expected to emerge? For instance, what is the role of the nation state and transnational movements in generating or sustaining liberal understandings of Islam in different parts of the world? Finally, how is liberal Islam shaped by the relationship between national identity and historical as well as current experiences with Islamic transnationalism? How does this phenomenon of Islamic globalism relate to globalisation and transnational forms of citizenship through a global civil society?

#### *Liberal Islam and liberalism*

Current discourse about liberal Islam is apparently concerned with its relationship to Western

conceptions of liberalism and secularism. According to Dalacoura (1998: 192), Islamic liberalism cannot be neatly explained in the terms of Western liberalism. Although 'liberalism and Islamic liberalism are bound together in Middle Eastern societies, the implication is that secularism is not an essential prerequisite for liberalism ... liberalism and Islamic liberalism are two separate phenomena conceptually'. Nurcholish Madjid is also concerned with the relevance of secularism to conceptualisations of liberal Islam when he speaks of a revitalisation of Islamic thought. One of his proposals for a liberalisation of outlook is what he calls 'secularization', which he defines broadly as all forms of liberating development. 'This liberating process is particularly needed because the *umma* [global Islamic community] as a result of its own historical growth is no longer capable of distinguishing—among the values which they consider Islamic—those that are transcendental from those that are temporal' (Madjid 1998: 286).

This dual engagement of the historical and modern contexts of Islamic societies is integral to conceptualisations of liberal Islam as an interpretive approach that contrasts the historical context of the original formulation of religious doctrine to the modern context in which it is to be understood and applied. The proponents of liberal Islam are concerned with applying the insights and methodology of this historically contextual approach to contemporary issues in the Islamic world, with due regard to the central role of religion in the political culture of Islamic societies. Consequently, the terms in which the discussion of Islamic liberal thought must be framed, as well as the substantive aspects and tensions of that discussion, are clearly different from those of debates about liberalism in other parts of the world. But this difference should not be exaggerated either. For example, Islamic liberal thought cannot assume or presuppose Western conceptions of secularism, the nation-state, modernity, or civil society, while still having to deal with those conceptions within the present realities of globalisation and power relations. This negotiation of the liberal Islamic nation-state with secularism and the dynamics of the state's relationship with civil society can be briefly illustrated here with the cases of Tunisia and Turkey.

Abdelbaki Hermassi conceptualises contemporary Tunisian civil society as the result of several genealogies that are emerging from a different historical phase. 'The historical formation of civil society in Tunisia is best viewed in terms of an

accumulation of consecutive layers, from the traditionalist associations through the colonialist and nationalist periods, to the corporatist associations and current diversification' (Hermassi 1995: 77). By traditional associations he means very old associations, such as groups that managed water distribution or administered religious charitable foundations (*awqaf*) and other philanthropic associations. The next layer of associational life emerged during the colonial encounter, like *al-Khalduniyyah*, a 'society' of civil character with a cultural orientation established by the modern elite created by French colonial rule. Another layer came with the creation of unions, political parties, professional associations, and art academies under the National Front that was in power in 1936. Eventually, 'the Destour Party [that led the country to independence] gradually established control over these organisations and created new ones in sectors where the party thought a supporting constituency would be crucial', including 'workers, peasants, businessmen, students, women, and youth' (Hermassi 1995: 77).

After independence these groups were brought under direct state control, under the aegis of a 'corporatist system of interest representation'. As a result of this primacy of the state over civil society, the latter had to be reclaimed by social actors in 'the absence of a free space for social and political expression' (Hermassi 1995: 78). The state forced these dissenting voices, including Islamic opposition groups, to seek alternative political arenas. This emergence of mass opposition movements led the government to re-evaluate its traditional hostility towards civil society organisations, with mixed results, as state authorities keep fluctuating between oppression and open engagement. What is interesting in Hermassi's sketch is that his historical understanding of the *lived* political culture of Islam is a framework that does not label political action exclusively as 'liberal' or 'conservative' but simply as a mode of legitimate intervention in claiming rights over a space. Whether one agrees or disagrees with that political action, its essential character as a civil act within a particular civil society cannot be denied.

### *Liberal Islam, the nation-state, and civil society*

Maintaining that the emergence of liberalism presupposes and is inextricably linked to the modern state as an ideal type, Dalacoura (1998: 195) see the key question here as one of a balance between the two: 'Does the state develop into a modern formation in tandem with civil society? Or does it develop perpetually threatened by it or threatening it?'

Regarding this tripartite relationship in the case of Turkey, Binnaz Toprak challenges commonly held views about the relationship between secularism and fundamentalism. She asserts that those movements, often monolithically classified as 'Islamic fundamentalism', are, indeed, *consistent* with liberal and progressive values. Pointing out that the plurality of Islamic political groups in Turkey covers a wide range of organisations, with a spectrum of political positions and beliefs, Toprak (1995: 95) writes, 'Indeed, militant Islam is a fringe movement within the larger context of a plethora of Islamic groups and organizations'.

The negotiations of these groups with the nation-state over claims to political space and action can be conceptualised as a form of civil society that calls into question the relationships among the nation-state, secularism, and religion. On the one hand, the state's

**Some Islamist groups argue for a more inclusive secularism that does not relegate religion solely to the private sphere but grants it legitimacy as the basis of action in the public realm**

strong promotion of secularism in Turkey has clearly enabled a political culture for the articulation for diverse voices, including those of the Islamist groups. On the other hand, some of these groups have launched their own challenge to aspects of the state, including secularism, on *religious* grounds as well as for excluding the rural uneducated majority of the population. Thus, these groups are arguing for a more inclusive secularism that does not relegate religion solely to the private sphere but grants it legitimacy as the basis of action in the public realm. Indeed, such deeply contextual conceptions of secularism

are necessary for a cultural legitimisation of human rights, regulating the relationship between religion and the state, and enhancing the moral depth of secularism (An-Na'im 2001).

In their assessments of civil society, both Toprak and Hermassi emphasise the fact that any thinking on civil society requires a simultaneous rethinking of the role of the nation-state and the lived meaning of

secularism in various societies. In view of my emphasis on the relationship between local-national civil society and global civil society, only a genuinely pluralistic globalism will be able to guarantee a global civil society so that every voice, no matter how apparently insignificant, is included in that society. I now turn to the phenomenon of Islamic globalism for insights in this connection.

#### *Islamic globalism and global civil society*

Public discourse in the West often tends to equate Islamic globalism with pan-national fundamentalist networks. However, an assessment of Islamic globalism beyond this limited view shows that it can represent an alternative mode of forging social identity that, at the same time, draws upon and offers opportunities of response to globalisation. While not asserting particular conclusions about the long-term outcomes to conceptualisations of global civil society, I do believe that such social formations should be taken seriously as interlocutors and actors in the ongoing construction of global civil society.

To clarify this point, I will argue that there is nothing in the phenomenon of Islamic globalism as such to make it inherently conservative or intolerant. Second, I will assess the relationship between Islamic globalism and globalisation by focusing on the nature and role of the Muslim diaspora. In this light, one wonders whether Islamic globalism today represents a notion of transnational citizenship, and what that means for conceptualisations of global civil society.

In the course of his exploration of how Islam has 'travelled' in the course of history, and continues to travel today, Mandaville states:

*The multifaceted nature of identity has, under translocality, brought forth a diverse new set of political practices. These involve the possibility that any given individual may have ties and identity claims which pertain to more than one nation and state (or neither) . . . the activities of such individuals are not limited to a single political space, either in terms of territory or discourse. One's presence in a particular territorial state does not restrict one from engaging in transnational relations*

*which seek to politicise a component of self-identity which is not 'of' the territory from which these activities emanate. (Mandaville 2001: 50-1, emphasis in original)*

He also emphasises the diversity and continuity of the migrations of Muslims throughout their history, both within and across the borders of the Muslim world. Mandaville's argument is that the contemporary and visible form of Islamic globalism cannot be seen as an entirely new phenomenon, because it shares both historical continuities with Islam and modernity and a structural relationship with the interplay of capital.

One new aspect of Islamic globalism may be the shift in the nature and location of the recent Muslim diaspora experiences in Western Europe and North America which will probably have far-reaching consequences for Muslim views of themselves and of the 'other'. As Mandaville (2001: 127) observes, 'Muslims in diaspora come face to face with the myriad shapes and colours of global Islam, forcing the religion to hold a mirror up to its own diversity.'

These encounters often play an important role in processes of identity formation, prompting Muslims to relativise and compare their self-understandings of Islam'. As he explains: 'This process of relativisation allows Muslims to partake in a discourse of particularity, one in which their conception of religion is no longer universal ... this is also a space in which no particular conception of Islam is negated. Difference is negotiated rather than eradicated' (Mandaville 2001: 181). Thus, 'lived Islam' in the diaspora necessitates negotiating the differences between Islamic communities and finding common ground by re-examining what Islam means in more inclusive ways.

In this light, the case of the Muslim diaspora in the age of globalisation is extremely instructive as an analogy for understanding global civil society. As a result of accelerated globalisation, more and more communities are constantly negotiating how to share space and cooperate in pursuit of common concerns with more and more 'others'. What is new in these processes for most diasporic Muslim communities is that they encounter each other in a space that is

'Lived Islam' in the diaspora necessitates negotiating the differences between Islamic communities and finding common ground by re-examining what Islam means in more inclusive ways ....

neutral regarding difference *among* Muslim communities, though it may *not* be neutral in its perceptions of Muslim communities or Islam in general. Regardless of its reasons, which can include ignorance, indifference, or even prejudice, the nation-state in which diasporic Muslim communities exist is unlikely in its policies to privilege one Muslim community over another. Should similar conditions prevail in predominantly Islamic societies, through internal transformations and external influence that would provide the necessary space for global civil society to thrive and include such understandings of Islam? The analogy of Islamic globalism can also be instructive in challenging normative conceptions of global civil society that seek to define political action, state-society relations, and institutions in a manner that empties them of their specific local content. Only through recognition of this very specific content in its own historical context can the concept of global civil society be made meaningful for most people around the world.

Another form of Islamic globalism discussed by Mandaville is transnational Muslim organisations, offering possibilities of transnational citizenship, which question a conception of citizenship as an abstraction of the relationship between the individual and the state. By occupying a particular political *space* (in the sense of an agenda dealing with gender issues, human rights, religious and/or ethnic identity), which is not necessarily a specific *place*, these transnational social movements can provide an alternative definition of citizenship. The existence of such transnational groups is easily overlooked because they do not fall into the range of activities usually associated in dominant discourse with the political in the sense of addressing the state or even explicitly recognising its existence. Many such organisations, like Jam'at al-Tabligh, operate across and between bordered spaces, representing a diverse range of interests, often related to the sustenance or advancement of various ethnic and/or religious identities (Mandaville 2001: 16).

Such transnational organisations provide a notion of *participatory social-cultural citizenship* as an alternative understanding of citizenship itself. In the

case of the Jama'at al-Tabligh, that participatory social-cultural citizenship is inextricably tied to religious identity in expressing a specific conception of religion as concerned simultaneously with an ethics of social action and questions of cultural identity. The notion of *participatory social-cultural citizenship* may be an effective way of thinking of different forms of participation of *individuals* in global civil society. For instance, the criteria of participation for organisations (and individuals) in global civil society need not be restricted to the exclusively secular, nor framed solely in terms of explicitly political issues.

... in this light, the case of the Muslim diaspora in the age of globalisation is extremely instructive as an analogy for understanding global civil society

### Liberation theology

Liberation theology emerged as a movement in Latin America around 1968–71 in pursuit of radical structural change with the goal of liberating oppressive structures (MacLean 1999: 123; Turner 1994: 3, 9). According to one of its founders, the fundamental tenets of liberation theology combine the love of God with the urgency of solidarity with the poor (Gutiérrez, 1999: 27). Viewing the Latin American context as an 'unjust environment', this movement emphasised human agency in taking direct action to help the poor, and used a Marxist social analysis in working towards a socialist system that ultimately 'shares' [the] wealth (Fitzgerald 1999: 229; Turner 1999: 4). During the 1980s and 1990s, the movement evolved to encompass a more integrative social framework to include race, gender, culture, and ecological issues (Turner 1994: 5; Tombs 2001: 46–8).

Liberation theology is primarily an ecclesiastical movement with a focus on the liberation of the poor (Berryman 1987: 157; Duque 1995: 54). Its ideology is based on the assumption that oppressed peoples and classes are fundamentally in conflict with their oppressors who are the wealthy nations and oppressive classes (Gutiérrez 1973: 36). While the movement is by no means uniform, its various currents share the same three assumptions: that the majority of individuals live in a state of underdevelopment and unjust dependence, that this state is sinful as viewed in Christian terms, and that it is the

responsibility of the members of the Church to work to overcome this sinful state (Galilea 1979: 167). The same fundamental theme was also expressed as the 'preferential option for the poor', which was defined by Gutiérrez (1999: 27) in terms of 'solidarity with the poor and rejection of poverty as something contrary to the will of God'. This conception, which is the fundamental underlying theme of the whole movement, is linked to the work of grass-roots Christian communities and the evangelical mission of the Church (Gutiérrez, 1999: 19).

Liberation theology is a movement away from the metaphysical, and represents a paradigm shift from classical theology by focusing on and putting God's will into practice in solidarity with the poor, in contrast to the 'detachment and reflection' of traditional theology (Gutiérrez 1999: 28–9; Rowland 1999: 4). Instead of classic theology's reliance on philosophy, liberation theology uses social science analysis and seeks to link 'right action' with 'right thinking' (Richard 1991: 2; Williams 1998: 199). Whereas traditional Christianity frames the concept of utopia as being realised only through a direct act of God, liberation theology perceives it as a matter of practice. Gutiérrez also stresses the communitarian experience as essential to liberation practice, and that methodology is manifest in spirituality and one's life as a Christian. He links the relationship of Christian life and method to the ascending importance of Base Ecclesiastical Communities as agents of theological reflection (Gutiérrez 1999: 30). Resonating with Gandhian thought, liberation theology distinguishes between material poverty, which is 'the lack of economic goods necessary for a human life worthy of the name', and spiritual

poverty, 'an interior attitude of unattachment to the goods of this world' (Gutiérrez 1973: 204). From a Christian perspective, poverty is contrary to human dignity and against the will of God (Gutiérrez 1973: 291).

Through its use of social scientific analysis, liberation theology views the cause of poverty in Latin America as inequality in the system of power and ownership that inhibits access of the masses to participation in society (Boff 1979: 129). Liberation theologians have rejected conceptions of development theory as being based on the assumption that Third World countries were underdeveloped due to exclusively internal factors, or that the solution to end poverty was for these countries to 'catch up' by developing. Instead, they argue that massive poverty is not an accident. 'It is the result of *structures of exploitation and domination*; it derives from centuries of *colonial domination* and is reinforced by the present international *economic system*' (Dussel 1984: 89; emphasis in original).

The movement always had an ambivalent relationship with the Vatican. The Vatican's response has been consistently wary of the political role of liberation theology, especially its use of Marxism as a tool of social analysis, while at the same time apparently supporting the movement's agenda of social justice. To the Vatican, liberation theology's advocacy of an alternative church (the *iglesia popular* or people's church) is an affront to the official church (Gibellini 1988: 46). Leading liberation theologians like Gutiérrez and Boff continue to insist that Marxism is used only as a conduit to understanding societal forms of oppression. But the Vatican and other critics hold that Marxism cannot be used for empirical analysis without regard for its critique of religion itself (Turner 1999: 203).

Liberation theology continues to be practised at the grass-roots level, and those who spearheaded efforts to further the movement during its inception continue to be prolific in their writings today. However, new strains have emerged and, although the underlying theme remains liberation from oppression, diverse perspectives within the movement have their own strong new agendas. Liberation theology has also lost large numbers of supporters due to changes in political, social, and religious circumstances throughout Latin America.

Commentators mention several factors as contributing to the decline of liberation theology in recent years, such as the perceived failure of Marxism,



Above: Demonstrators in Peru use religious imagery in their protest against the lack of help from the government when the savings scheme CLAE collapses. © Annie Bunker/Panos Pictures.

conflict with the Vatican, and the rise of Pentecostalism. Another factor is the need to expand its social and political analysis to include such issues as race, gender, culture, and sexuality, as well as indigenous peoples and ecological concerns. The dilemma facing the movement now is that such diversification is necessary for it to remain relevant, but it also diminishes the clarity of its original focus (Tombs 2001: 53–6).

Finally, the religious situation in Latin America has become more pluralist, with the rise of Pentecostal churches that are posing a serious challenge to Catholicism as well as liberation theology (Tombs 2001: 55). The focus of liberation theology on a purely socio-economic analysis of conflict without addressing the dynamics of culture and religion may have contributed to Latin Americans turning to other religious movements (Moltman 1998: 74).

However, the strong focus on poverty and development linked liberation theology to other intellectual and political currents in the region, as well as to global trends. For example, Paulo Freire criticised the churches for failing to exercise their true prophetic function, and called on the churches to take sides in struggles for political liberation in order to avoid supporting repressive regimes. Freire also sees a relationship between black theology and Latin American liberation theology in that both have a political nature, both are aligned with the struggle of the oppressed, and both emphasise revolutionary praxis (Elias 1994: 145). Black North American liberation theology parallels Latin American liberation theology in that its leaders also deviated from the traditional theological paradigm. Latin American liberation theology reflected a move from developmentalism to liberation, while black theology reflected the passage from the ideal of integration to that of black power.

Other parallel theologies, including Asian, African, and feminist, have arisen out of struggles in reaction against the European and North American theological establishment that tended to assume that its theology was simply 'Christian' theology. African liberation theology differs from Latin American liberation theology with its focus on the problem of 'indigenization and the role of native African religions' (Ferm 1992: 3). In Asia, liberation theo-

logians face the challenge that Christianity is a minority religion. Each strain of theology is uniquely suited to its context, but all are linked by the preferential option for the poor. Dialogue between Latin American liberation theologians and feminist theologians has taken place mostly in the context of international ecumenical conferences, but dialogue has been rare, and it is argued that this dialogue is superficial and cautious (Vuola 1997).

The highly contextual nature of liberal Islam and liberation theology raises the question of how such localised forms of civil society can also function as part of global civil society. As briefly explained earlier, the exclusiveness of such local and regional associations is not necessarily inconsistent with their participation in global civil society provided they subscribe to a shared normative content. The idea of overlapping consensus requires unity of purpose and mutual respect for difference, not ideological and associational uniformity. But, as also emphasised throughout this chapter, this consensus building must take account of the 'unevenness' of political and institutional power relations between different regions of the world. The process of inclusion and incorporation of local or regional participants, like liberal Islam and liberation theology, should also be sensitive to the risks of serious cross-cultural misunderstandings which can be compounded by religious and cultural normative differences among all participants in global civil society.

The idea of overlapping consensus requires unity of purpose and mutual respect for difference, not uniformity. But this consensus building must also take account of the 'unevenness' of global power relations

## Concluding Remarks

The main question for this chapter is how concepts of global civil society can engage and encompass the centrality of religious and cultural identity for most people and communities throughout the world, including Western societies. Since this cannot mean the automatic inclusion of all forms of religious expressions, as some may be inherently inconsistent with the underlying rationale and purpose of global civil society, I have attempted to argue for a way of promoting possibilities of consistency between the two. The approach I proposed above is the development of a synergistic

and interdependent model of the relationship between religion and global civil society, whereby understandings of religion are supportive of corresponding conceptualisations of global civil society and the latter are conceived in ways that are supportive of such understandings of religion. The policy question for this approach is how to promote conditions that are conducive to those mutually supportive understandings of religion and conceptualisations of civil society.

The analysis I presented in this chapter is based on the interplay between the composition and function or purpose of global civil society, the dynamics of specific place and space, and the impact of that on the way it operates in practice. Taking global civil society to be the space where people and transnational entities debate and negotiate the rules of their relationships and pursue accountability for those rules, in furtherance of their respective concerns, my analysis is also concerned with the relationship between space and place. The physical location of actors conditions their perceptions of the agenda and priority of global civil society as well as their ability to act in solidarity with others in pursuit of their own objectives.

Since any function or purpose of global civil society would necessarily presuppose a certain minimum normative content that cannot be presumed or expected to come about of its own accord, I am also concerned with the question of by whom and how that normative content is determined. Following an approach developed in relation to the universality of human rights, I propose a process of internal discourse within different constituencies of global civil society and dialogue between them, in order to promote an overlapping consensus about the normative content of their solidarity and cooperation. Full agreement on the subject may be lacking or insufficient at the beginning, but it cannot be promoted through a deliberate process without at least agreement on certain ground rules for the process of negotiation itself. These prerequisite conditions include mutual respect and appreciation of cultural and contextual difference and the possibility of peaceful coexistence, as well as an appreciation of the need for consensus-building,

instead of seeking to impose one's views on others. If accepted, this proposition gives us the basis for assessing the 'candidacy' of various constituencies

**Power relations among different constituencies are critical for the ability of all constituencies, especially those based in the Third World, to participate in determining the function of global civil society**

for membership in global civil society. This, of course, applies to secular ideological or philosophical as well as religious constituencies, because any of them can fail to live up to the minimum requirements of membership in global civil society. But religious constituencies happen to be my concern in this chapter.

I also highlighted in the first section several factors that affect the dynamics of membership in global civil society on the basis of above-mentioned minimum criteria, but emphasised the impact of differentials in power relations between constituencies based in

developed countries and those located in the Third World. In my view, power relations among different constituencies are critical for the ability of all constituencies, especially those based in the Third World, to participate in determining the function of global civil society. These relations also condition the impact of location on the nature of the space it provides, as well as the practical operation of global civil society.

With regard to religious constituencies in particular, however, the ultimate question is how to mediate the presumed exclusivity of religious communities on the one hand, and the requirements of inclusion, civility, and freedom of choice of civil society on the other. According to the proposed model for promoting an overlapping consensus, this tension can be mediated through an internal discourse within religious communities and dialogue with other constituencies. For those engaged in internal discourse within their own religious communities the challenge is how to promote understandings and practice of their religion that are more inclusive, civil, and voluntary. But they cannot succeed without the cooperation and support of other constituencies of global civil society in addressing the legitimate concerns of those communities. The questions of which concerns are legitimate and how to address them should themselves be debated through the same process. I briefly illustrated this point by suggesting that the best response to the threat of international terrorism

from a global civil society perspective is to uphold the rule of law in international relations while addressing the underlying grievances that motivate terrorists and their supporters. The main conclusion of the first section is that the contingent possibilities of reconciliation between religious and other constituencies of global civil society must be actively sought by all sides, instead of passively waiting for religious persons and communities to succeed or fail the test of inclusion.

The remaining sections in the chapter offered an elaboration and illustration of the main thesis presented in the first section. While Gandhi's approach to religion demonstrates possibilities of positive contributions to global civil society, in my view religious fundamentalism is clearly an unacceptable expression of religious beliefs. However, the main point of my discussion of Islamic fundamentalism is that possibilities of an effective Islamic response are contingent on a combination of internal and external conditions. The cases of liberal Islam and liberation theology represent regional manifestations of global civil society that are rooted in a religious discourse. Civil society is commonly understood in the context of nationalism and national boundaries, while the notion of global civil society seeks to add a transnational dimension through the existence of organisations, telecommunications networks, a public sphere where institutions sharing common goals and agendas cooperate in pursuit of shared objectives. The subsection on Islamic globalism raises the question of how this discourse of nationalism and transnationalism takes into account religion as a medium of both earlier and current forms of identity and experience. Does this phenomenon offer a basis for a transnational form of citizenship through a global civil society, and on whose terms? One possible contribution of religion to global civil society is that it can help mobilise believers in a moral and spiritual challenge to the globalisation of capitalism and consumerism, as illustrated by the case of liberation theology.

The general policy implication of my analysis is to challenge conceptions of global civil society as essentially defined by Western perspectives and experiences, and the assumption that what remains to be done is to develop the rudimentary or unsatisfactory forms of global civil society in other parts of the world according to that definitive model. In my view, these assumptions and their implications seriously undermine the true 'globality' of global civil

society, which cannot be founded on universalising a region-specific formation as the most 'successful' embodiment of the concept. The effort should therefore be to conceptualise a more truly global civil society in terms of the actual social conditions of all parts of the world. Given the reality of drastic 'unevenness' and serious differentials in power relations among different regions of the world, valid conceptualisations of global civil society must therefore account for transnational and trans-regional, trans-cultural, and trans-religious contestations of its own premise and assumptions. But, in seeking to do so, one should be prepared to encounter developments and movements that challenge the premise or necessary implications of global civil society, as well as those that are more compatible with at least the core values and institutions of civil society.

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